Postscript

"There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesome returns of conjecture out of such trifling investments of fact." (Mark Twain)

Most people who live, work and play in the Clark Fork River watershed know little or nothing about scientific inquiry on our water quality and aquatic resources. But whether we know it or not, we all benefit from the work of those who strive to improve our understanding of the river and its environs, many of which are detailed in these symposium proceedings.

The Clark Fork's fish, bugs, algae and water quality have been probed, dissected, shocked, sampled, strained, diluted and filtered by hundreds, perhaps thousands of investigators during the decade of the 1980's. Millions of dollars have been spent by government agencies and companies responsible for pollution of the river, An impressive body of knowledge has been acquired by these collective efforts since the pulp mill at Frenchtown proposed to expend its effluent discharge in 1984.

Even Twain might be impressed. With such an impressive investment of fact, surely we could reap a wholesome harvest of conjecture.

We've invested a great deal in the science reported in these symposium proceedings. This should continue. But, unfortunately, science seldom provides absolute answers to all questions. Often the most valuable scientific investigations will raise as many questions as it answers.

We would be naive to expect too much from our science.

Most of the water resource issues on the Clark Fork will be settled, in the final analysis, through a combination of scientific investigation and politics. But without the science, we will be ill-equipped to make any sort of sound decisions; political, emotional or otherwise, on how to protect water quality in the river.

If you ask people who live here what they want, you'll almost always hear that folks want action. Most will agree we should understand what our actions will achieve before we take them, but they want action nonetheless.

We need careful, thoughtful investigation. We need to understand. Nut studies are not acceptable replacement for action.

The public wants action to make things better while we study, or even to just keep things from getting worse. This presents a stiff challenge to all of us involved with protecting the river, whether we represent government, industry or environmental groups. We don't have all the answers, we'll never get all the answers, but the public wants us to make progress based on what we know today.

It's a tough position to be in. We still always wish we knew more. We will continuously be second guessed. We know we will make mistakes. Nut if we have the courage to act on our convictions, to use the knowledge we have, to use our common sense when all else fails, we can make outstanding progress.

We've proven this to be true on the Clark Fork by restricting phosphorous discharge from industry, banning the sale of phosphorous detergents, taking actions to prevent fish kills, stabilizing tailings ponds and even removing mine wastes from the floodplain.

This river is on the mend. Our efforts must go on, while we continue our careful scientific investigation to guide our actions as much as possible. The stream is recovering, and can probably be restored to one of the finest aquatic ecosystems on the continent. We can make it work, and we can make it last. But we must continue to study, and we must continue to act.

A friend shared this old, anonymous prayer with me recently. I think it applies to the matter at hand

> *God grant me the courage to change what I can change;*
> *The serenity to accept what I cannot change;*
> *And the wisdom to know the difference.*

I would modify those words of wisdom only slightly for those who look to science to guide their actions on behalf of the Clark Fork River:

> *God grant me the courage to act when I have enough information;*
> *The serenity to wait when I don't*
> *And the wisdom to know the difference.*

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